The Bystander

The Bystander and Jack London
Volcano Breeds a New Hot One
A Chance to Kill Time.
Does It Pay to Keep Chickens?

Jack London has evidently come home from his experiences with the cannibals with an unchastened spirit. In fact, I might say, without danger of inviting a libel suit, that after two years of floating through the placid waters of the sunny south; after enjoying the beauties of the Paradise of the Pacific; the gentle breezes of Tahiti; the soft languor of Samoa, he has returned to the chill fogs of his native San Francisco with the same old grouch on with which he left it. He says that he was robbed in Hawaii. Now that has a familiar sound. Some bunko steerer may have taken him into camp, for all I know, while he was dreaming dreams in Honolulu, but that is nothing new.

We have Jack's own word for it that he was robbed in San Francisco before he left there. The yacht builders robbed him; the engine builders bunkoed him; the riggers held him up; the provision men did him up; the whole "burgeois" push stood him up.

According to a philippic in the choicest Londonese vocabulary, the simple savages of Tahiti can give the pirates of San Francisco cards and spades and then beat them a mile, for even they "robbed" Jack, until about all he got away from port with was the Snark and the cook, and later on the cook got away with Jack and Sydney got away with the Snark; at least she was tied up there in rotten row the last I heard of her.

Who "robbed" Jack in Samoa, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and the other primitive communities which he honored with his presence, I do not know; but it is cocksure that some one did, for Jack is "robbed" everywhere he goes, according to his own admission.

And yet Jack says we Honolulans are "provincial." Now, by provincial, I understand that he means countrified; that we do things in a backwoods manner, unique to ourselves and different from the usual and the customary. But, according to Jack himself, we are right in the swim, doing just what all the rest of this wicked world is doing, viz.: robbing Jack London.

By Jack London accused, by Jack London are we acquitted of the grave crime of provinciality.

The obvious conclusion would appear to be, either that Mr. London is a Rube of so pronounced a type that everybody with an itching for plunder snuggles up to him on sight, and proceeds to help himself from the pockets of an easy mark, or else that he is conspicuously provincial himself; for if there is any one thing more provincial than another, it is to imagine that everybody is watching you; that the world is lying awake nights trying to do you up.

"Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone," is as true as gospel, whether Ella Wheeler Wilcox originated or stole it.

The truth is, Jack London is not a "rube," nor is the world trying to rob him, as his virile imagination suggests.

The workmen and the dealers of San Francisco, Honolulu and Tahiti are neither robbers nor philanthropists. They are humbly following in the footsteps of Jack himself—trying to get all they can for what they have to sell.

Rumor says that Mr. London gets twenty-five cents a word for his stories, and some of the words are worth it.

The Bystander thinks he is lucky if he gets board, lodging, and carfare for his stories; and yet Mr. London is not a robber, nor The Bystander a monument of benevolence.

Doubtless Mr. London's publishers make unprintable remarks in the privacy of their beards; but Jack is a great writer, and when he says "two-bits a word; no pay, no story," the publisher pungles, and Jack buys a yacht and sails himself the world around—or part way round; while The Bystander, being only "a mediocre reporter," pockets the pittance which his meager abilities net him and visits a moving picture show around the corner, in lieu of foreign travel. And the mediocre reporter, in his poverty, laughs with the crowd at the fool pictures, and thinks this is a pretty good world after all; while Mr. London, with his two-bits a word, wails that the world is a thief, until his flood of tears obliterates the pleasure that might be his, and he sees nothing but a vista of robbers instead of the sunshine and flowers that are shining and blossoming around him. Say, Jack, come in out of the wet and take at least a smile, if not a laugh, with your despised fellow scribbler, The Bystander.

Now as to that "darned funny way to treat a lion." (By the way, I think that phrase is a gem, worth the highest retail price.) It is true that some of the Hawaiian papers (The Advertiser was not one of them) gave disagreeable prominence to the fact that one or two of Mr. London's checks came back from California dishonored, when the fact could easily have been ascertained that it was only by reason of a mistake; but that does not prove either that the reporters were mediocre or the editors provincial or cussed. It simply shows that they were inoculated by the mainland yellow journal virus, which is ever straining for a sensation; which plays up an item of idle gossip into a double-column screamer with a freak headline. It was making a mountain out of a molehill, worthy of the choicest yellow journalism of the mainland. It was anything but provincial—it was metropolitan journalism—country papers usually stick to items and tell the truth.

But, Jack, you ought to have learned by this time that one of the penalties of greatness, and rather belligerent greatness at that, is undue publicity.

If The Bystander had drawn a check on a bank where he had no funds, it would have simply been another case of busted mediocrity, not worth two lines in the police column; but when a great man does the same thing, regardless of explanation, it is great news, according to up-to-date yellow journal standards, as you ought to know by this time.

So keep your shirt on, Jack. Don't let a little thing like this raise your angry passions. In the long run, the public will learn that you pay your bills, are an honest man and a good citizen—in your way, while you will improve your digestion and enjoy life more.

But about those leprosy stories: You say that you wrote so truthful an account of the Molokai Settlement, that it received the approval of the authorities. You did. It so truthfully belied the tales of horror; the vision of clammy repulsiveness, which the usual fiction stories of Molokai—yours included—holds up to the shuddering public as a correct representation of the leper settlement, that if it could be done, I would have a million copies struck off and certified to by the Governor of Hawaii, as being a true description, and send a copy to every one who has been misled by the sensational yellow stories—yours included—which are published from time to time, not by "provincial reporters of mediocre ability," but by great writers of world fame, who exploit the agony and sorrow and shame of a gentle and helpless people and blight the reputation of an honest, progressive and generous community, by proclaiming that Hawaii is rotten and unsafe as a place of residence and her people despoilers of the innocent and the afflicted—and that is what your stories—"avowed fiction" you call them—do.

Fiction you know it to be. Fiction we know it to be; but the great world public knows that you are a realist; that when you write of arctic sealing, of Alaskan snows, of tramps, of jails, of London slums and San Francisco hoodlums, you are writing from the amplitude of your personal experience. It knows that you have personally investigated Hawaii in general and Molokai in particular, and when you locate scenes of violence, murderous assault, and unrestrained passion in an atmosphere of gloom unutterable, and label it "Molokai," and add to its realism by throwing in the name of the present superintendent and correct descriptions of some existing physical features of the locality, the great reading public does not discriminate between what is truth and what is fiction.

Your reputation for thoroughness and your masterly ability to depict the repulsive and the gruesome, carry conviction and fear. They leave an abiding impression in the mind of the uninformed that Hawaii is a *post mortem* spot—an unsafe place to live in; that Molokai is the abode of despair unalleviated by justice, unmitigated by mercy, and untempered by charity—an impression as wrong as it is unfair and injurious.

It makes no difference in the net effect upon our fortunes and reputations, whether you obtained your "facts" on the ground or evolved them from your fertile imagination in your study.

You know that an American resident in Hawaii is as safe from leprosy as you are from lightning in Glen Ellen, California.

You know that a tourist can travel through highways and byways of Hawaii and never see a leper.

You know that the Molokai Settlement is one of grand scenic beauty; that it is in a well-watered land of grass, trees and flowers; that the inmates are well cared for in neat and comfortable cottages, with more and better food than most of them had at home; that there are hospitals, doctors, "homes" for boys and girls, provided by the generosity of Hawaiian citizens and managed by devoted "brothers" and "sisters," from the United States, who are giving their lives to the work; that the Y. M. C. A. maintains a well-equipped building; that there are churches; that there is a military band; that the inmates own and use hundreds of horses; that horseracing, baseball and varied athletics are enthusiastically practised; that all this is done without expense to the inmates; that everything possible is done to minimize the grief and woe and heart-break incident to perpetual separation, while yet alive, from friends and family; that the people of Hawaii cheerfully and ungrudingly tax themselves hundreds and thousands of dollars every year, in a brave endeavor to stamp out leprosy by segregation, with the least possible hardship to those afflicted.

You know all this, and have written it more powerfully and lucidly than I can, in your true article about leprosy and Molokai; but no one would ever guess it from your "fiction" on the same subject.

You have a right to coin our distress into gold, by the alchemy of your pen.

God knows there is material enough in real life, without resorting to fiction, if you wish to transmute heartbreaks into cash; but what is a passing "story" to you, adding a few dollars to your bank account, is a ruthless blow to us of Hawaii, who are hoping against hope and straining every nerve to remove this dark cloud which hovers over our homes.

We were grateful when your true article was published, believing that we were to have your help in bearing our burden; and we were stung to the quick when it was followed by your "fiction," couched in the masterly diction of the apostle of the gruesome.

It was under the smart of resentment, arising from the blow of one whom he thought a friend, that The Bystander wrote the article that has irritated you. I did not write it; did not know of it until I saw it in print, and regret that it was couched in such harsh words; but the basic thought in the mind of the writer was that which is in the mind and hearts of the people of Hawaii, and that thought is this:

The leprosy question presents a problem to us of Hawaii most difficult of solution, involving not only our property interests and our reputations for humanity and justice; but the fate of hundreds of human lives—those of our fellow citizens—many of them our personal friends.

The problem calls endlessly for great sums of money; draws deep drafts upon our sympathies, and in many instances upon our heartstrings.

We are doing the best that we know how to solve it.

In solving the problem we need help—not financial, but moral. Help in making the truth known and in minimizing the loathing and repulsion inherently incident to the subject, which can best be achieved by the truthful and authentic statements of responsible people who have been on the ground, know the facts, and have the ear of the public.

As one who is an admirer of your literary work; a believer in your honesty of purpose and in your friendly feeling toward Hawaii; who thinks that your tales were written thoughtless of harm, and not through design to injure, I ask you, Jack London, to forego the possible profits of further fiction about leprosy in Hawaii, and lend us the powerful influence of your pen in spreading the unadulterated truth. Your friend, LORRIN A. THURSTON.

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Seeking a quiet, secluded place to rest my cramped legs yesterday, I wandered over from my shop to the rooms of the Honolulu Commotion Committee and found Secretary William Whooper sitting with his feet on the table and dictating a flamboyant circular with one hand while with the other he read a letter which seemed to excite him greatly.

What's up, Whooper?" I asked.

"This is great stuff," he exulted. "Gee, I'm glad I stumbled onto that writer, Bluffem. Some people said he was a faker, but I knew better. He has scooped the world. Just listen to this out of the letter I just got from him, written at the Volcano. He says:

" 'Entirely alone I visited the Volcano yesterday afternoon. Others may have done this; no doubt some of them have. But I—ah, I was completely overwhelmed by the sublime spectacle of the sea of molten fire. More than that, I was entirely overwhelmed by the molten fire itself. For I, Me, Josher H. Bluffem, the great writer who has not yet been discovered, descended alone and unaccompanied beneath the red hot lava and lived to tell the tale.

" 'It was late in the afternoon, several hours after darkness had descended upon the scene. As I remarked before, I was alone. There was nobody with me. If there had been, I should not have been alone.

" 'All by myself I began the descent of the treacherous crevasse. My progress was difficult, but I did not falter. I said to myself, "I will go on," and I went. I descended thousands of feet, and at length stood, all alone, on the quaking edge of the sea of fire. I gazed down into the depths of hell, but I was not afraid, even though I was alone.

" 'I was not satisfied. Others might, perhaps, do what I had done. I wanted to accomplish the impossible.

" 'Making sure that I was still alone, I took off my coat, folded it carefully, and laid it on a chunk of red hot lava. Then, removing my shoes, I poised myself on the brink above the molten fire, cast one swift look about me to be sure that I was still alone—and dove into Hell.

" 'The boiling rock eddied about me in the white-hot waves. I felt myself being consumed. My bones melted within me—but my courage remained firm. Down, down I went, ever down, until I reached the lowermost pit of the Infernal Regions. Satan met me with outstretched hand. "Hello, Bluffem," he said. "Glad to see you again. Warm weather we're having now, isn't it?"

" " "Yes, tell the Commotion Committee it's hot stuff," he said. to say hello. I'm on my way back now. Any word for the folks at home?"

" 'Yes, it is a little sultry, Sate, old boy,' I replied. "I just dropped in

" 'And then I came up, up through the pit of Hell. I was still alone. I arose about the middle of the molten lake and swam rapidly to the shore. Nobody was there; I was still alone. First carefully putting on my coat and shoes so as not to catch cold, I swooned on the brink. When I came to, I was still alone. I scorched a few postcards in the lava and then, still alone, made my way to the top of the crater and made for the Volcano House to get a new light for my pipe. Ever yours, JOSHER H. BLUFFEM.' "

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"Let us have a building ordinance," said one supervisor to another. "Let us tackle the proposition and take our everlasting time about it. Do not let us hurry, because if we do there will still be some places unbuilt on that might be affected. Let us take it up deliberately, going at the matter in the same grave, dignified way in which we have carried on our negotiations with the telephone company. We can talk big and do nothing for months on such an agreeable subject as a building ordinance. It will be a beautiful opportunity to kill time. We can probably have at least three or four rows with Marston Campbell and backwater from one stand to another as fast as we are exposed. This will give the voters the idea that we are standing up for the rights of the people against the grasping officials of the Frear administration. Properly conducted, the building ordinance stunt ought to keep us going until next November. Do not hurry, of course. Let us take our time. We can not afford to rush too hard on our salaries."

"Yes, let's," answered the other honorable member. "And if any newspaper calls attention to the delays in the matter we can get our supervisorial press agent to defend us. It's a good scheme."

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Each year after seeing all these fine chickens at the poultry show I have had serious thoughts of giving up my tailor shop and going into the business of raising chickens myself. It has always seemed to me such a fine, healthy, out-of-doors life. My wife has always approved, too, and keeps on reminding me of Paul Isenberg as an example of what a near-to-nature life can do for a man. After this year's poultry show I got the fever worse than ever, but the other day my enthusiasm got a set back. My good friend and old customer John Guild came in to have me put a V in the back of his Sunday pants, and as I knew he was a lover of fine chickens, I said to *myself*, "there's another living proof of how a man's ups and bank account both grow larger from raising chickens."

After I had walked around John Guild's figure with my measuring tape, for I couldn't stretch round, I said something about chickens. You should have seen the change.

"Chickens!" said he; "don't mention such things to me. Only yesterday I handed in my property returns to the tax office, and would you believe it, they pointed out that I had forgotten to fill in the value of my chickens. I examined the tax papers again, and sure enough there was a new schedule requiring a man to make returns for chickens, just the same as for automobiles. I was indignant and told the tax assessor my chickens were of little value.

"Then came the worst of all, when the man behind the wicket quoted the fact that I had taken most of the prizes at the poultry show. I subsided and meekly asked if I should not make returns and pay taxes on the family cat."

Now I am wondering if it would be a wise thing for me to give up the tailoring business after all.

Lone Observer on Punchbowl

The Lone Observer was sitting on the surveying mark that caps the highest scallop on the Punchbowl and was holding communion with his soul in the most approved manner of George Bernard Shaw and Ella Wheeler Wilcox. He was carefully brushing the Dust off himself, that same Dust which he had acquired through many months of life among the Dusty Nations.

Sitting thus he soliloquized in the following manner: "In a library there may be two books on a shelf, rubbing covers together, and one may treat of a hundred forms of demonology, of frescoed temples, of gong-beating, cramped-lived, yellow-skinned, mysticized orientals, and the other may treat of sabot-shod, cap-covered, bodiced, breezy peasants from the valleys of the Pyrenees or the wild posados of Old Castile. The reader may revel in the mustiness of the Orient and bask in Spanish sunshine in the same hour, but never in a year could he live life as the Chinese make it or enjoy life as the Spanish find it except in one place, and that is——"

The Lone Observer go up, stretched and "descended into the valley," to sit under a sycamore tree and play with part of the coming Portuguese generation. It was raining, and a water buffalo was grazing within twenty feet of the back of his neck over the embankment. Behind the water buffalo, who was posing for the "foreground balance," was a field of taro, palm-fringed, with Chinese in wide straw hats, working. But the Lone Obesrevr was not looking in back of him. He was looking in front.

By leaning over and looking around the corner of the fence he obtained a vista of Fort street. In this stage of its existence, Fort street has had the good fortune to overcome its birthright and has undergone a material change from the "progressiveness of Fort and King," proudly pointed out to the tourist as a sign of Honolulu's ambition developed in twenty-four years come February.

The street is here lined with houses set back into luxuriant gardens and lawns, with wide, clean porches. Up the street is an old woman who is returning from the Portuguese church on Punchbowl street. She is dressed in the wide black skirt, the shawl and the bodice of the villages that lie back of the Serras da Estrella on the Zezera or in the Azores. She is the only figure in the street; is there ever more than one in the pen pictures of the authors who have basked in the Latin provinces? This is Portugal; the Lone Observer stood up and turned to look into the dull eyes of the water buffalo, who had mistaken his back hair for pond grass. He saw the Chinaman and the taro and the palms and shrugged his shoulders.

At this particular spot there are meadows which grace lower Pauoa, but which, unfortunately, have never gone into the literature of the promotion committee, and are consequently overlooked by the beauty-loving tourists who gaze in rapture from a Young Hotel window at the scenery of Bishop Park. Lower Pauoa and Punchbowl village is a "byway" that takes a "basking author," a rent collector, or the Lone Observer to find.

The Lone Observer, having imbibed the satire of the Dusty Nations, naturelly dwelt on the above reflection, and passed as he did so down the rejuvenated Fort street. The Portuguese is a white man. The difference between a white man and the oriental, as displayed on the international bargain counters of Honolulu, is that the former is a homebuilder and the second is satisfied with a mat-covered room in an unspeakable tenement. Being a white man—the Portuguese of Punchbowl share the general distinction noted, despite the report of the police, the opinion of the wise ones, and the experience of others that he is the most troublesome of the races that are represented in the loveliest fleet of islands that was ever anchored in any ocean by the grace of God and the consent of the board of supervisors.

The head of the house may come home as spifflicated as a boiled owl and may foster blind pigs by the score, figure as principal in saloon rows, and get himself on the police court calendar for "2916," but he builds homes, and that is why the white race is supreme, which reflection is not original with the Lone Observer, but originated in the abstruse minds of profound philosophists.

Not being concerned with the results, but merely with the homes, the Lone Observer turned into Punchbowl street. The Portuguese is not a storekeeper, and the pakes have encroached on his preserves to the extent of selling him the necessities of life. In consequence the little shacks in two chapters which house the thrifty celestial and his stock are scattered along the road, and, undismayed by the neatness that prevails, has erected the same half-whitewashed, slant-roofed, sloppy structures that he does in Moiliiii and his own Chinatown.

In any other community this little section of modern cottages, neatly furnished and well gardened about, would attract no attention; in Honolulu it is the one connecting link between the sugar barren homes of Makiki and the tenemental blots on the city's escutcheon in the oriental quarters.

Besides, it's Portugal. Three hundred yards away the Lone Observer ran into the thriving center of an American community; three hundred yards beyond that he passed again into the haunts of the unwashed.

"Two books on one shelf," said the Lone Observer, sniffing the smells of Shanghai, Canton, and Hongkong. "Two books on one shelf—a dragon on the cover of one, and a guitar on the cover of the other."

The President and Baseball

Christian Science Monitor.

Small wonder that the reported additions to the baseball holdings of the Taft family create Nation-wide interest, for is not everything connected with baseball and everything connected with the Taft family of national consequence? When, as in the present instance, baseball and the Tafts are brought into closer alliance; when, in addition to owning a ball team in Chicago, the Taft family becomes the owner of a ball ground in Philadelphia, and the team and the ground are in the National League, and it is known that the head of the Taft family, that is to say, the President of the United States, is looking forward with impatient, but pleasant, anticipations to the opening of the baseball season of 1910—when all of these circumstances are put together and on top of them the popular interest in the game is taken into consideration, it is small wonder, we say, that the Nation should be interested from center to circumference in the latest baseball expansion of the Taft family.

The head of the family, it will be remembered, was hurried from Boston to Chicago one day last September that he might be able to attend a game of ball in which the family team was one of the contestants. Our readers will remember how the train was speeded over mountain and prairie, how the program of the trip was adjusted, how the stay in Chicago was arranged, how the distinguished visitor was hustled from reception to reception, with the one point constantly in view of getting him into the grandstand in time to see the beginning of the first inning.

That was in 1909. And in that year the Tafts owned only one league ball team. This year, already, they own a ball ground as well as a team, and the ground is in one city while the team is in another. Will they alternate in this way before the year is out all around the league circle? Will the Tafts own a team in this city, say, and a ground in that, or will they continue to increase their baseball holdings until they own teams and grounds in each of the National League cities, so that the head of the family whenever he goes out upon an itinerary can attend a family league game wherever he happens to be?

These are things that all lovers of the national game are anxious to know. For they are a little uncertain as to one point. If the Taft family should come into possession of all the baseball teams and all the baseball grounds, would President Taft, being the head of the family as well as the head of the country, insist upon placing league baseball under federal control and inspection, or would he be willing to grant it a simple federal license or charter and permit it to manage its own affairs?

HIGHER THAN THE BOSS.

Mucker—Jones thinks he is boss.
Hooker—But his wife is the board of estimate.—*Brooklyn Life.*